

28 August 1974

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Limits of Cuban Subversion in Latin America

SUMMARY

Cuban subversion in Latin America -- in all of its forms -- is at its nadir. Tangible support of revolutionaries is negligible, training in clandestine and guerrilla methods has been sharply reduced, while strident, exhortative propaganda has been virtually eliminated. Cuban intelligence officers and agents in the region are primarily concerned with collecting information and proselytizing, and only in the case of the Chilean military government has recent evidence linked them to subversive efforts. Castro's eschewal of aggressive and surreptitious methods in recent years in favor of conventional diplomacy reflects fundamental shifts in his objectives in the hemisphere. He now collaborates with governments and groups that conform to his loose definition of "revolutionary," while withdrawing from his previously intimate relationships with the subversive factions of the 1960's. The outlook for the next few years, moreover, is for a continuation of current trends. Castro is not likely to endanger the gains he has made in the region for the sake of any marginal subversive group, and probably will continue to find means of cooperating with most of the governments of the region, including some that he considers his ideological opposites.

1. After sponsoring subversive ventures in Latin America for nine years, Castro began to reappraise his methods and objectives in 1968. Successive and costly failures by revolutionary groups, increasing Soviet pressure, rapidly changing conditions in the hemisphere,

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and domestic problems persuaded him gradually to abandon subversive techniques. Subsequent efforts to extend Cuban influence through overt and legal means succeeded dramatically, and encompassing shifts in Castro's view of his role in the region became apparent. He continued to assert that he would only work with "revolutionary" governments, but by the early 1970's his definition of the term had changed so significantly that "patriotic" regimes "independent of the US" were fully acceptable to him. A majority of Latin American and Caribbean governments now meet Castro's still evolving "revolutionary" criteria.

2. Eight of them maintain diplomatic ties with Cuba despite the OAS sanctions and in defiance of the US. As he considers these governments "revolutionary," it is consistent that Castro has systematically loosened or cut his ties with Communist and subversive groups that oppose them. None of the latter are known to receive Cuban support. Castro favors the government-sponsored labor sector in Peru for instance, instead of the Communist union. He collaborates with the Burnham government in Guyana, though this has been at the expense of his previously close ties with Cheddi Jagan's Marxist opposition party. He supports Mrs. Peron's government, despite its rightward drift, and is more anxious to reap the benefits from his favorable trade relationship with Argentina than to support dissidents. The principal Argentine guerrilla group maintains contact with Havana, and may receive small amounts of technical support, but evidence of this is lacking. Guerrillas in Mexico, on the other hand, probably have no direct ties with Cuba.

3. Several other countries now considering the establishment of formal ties with Havana are also deemed "revolutionary" by Castro. The new governments of Venezuela, Colombia, and Costa Rica seem to qualify, and there is no evidence of Cuban support to local subversives. On July 26th Castro responded favorably to remarks by Venezuelan government spokesmen advocating the normalization of relations with Cuba. He indicated that he expects other governments in the region to re-establish ties with Havana in coming months, and pledged that this would be done "on the basis of absolute reciprocal respect and fraternal cooperation." Although not an explicit renunciation of

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subversion, this was Castro's most unequivocal effort to date to reassure Latin American leaders that his objectives in the hemisphere have changed since the 1960's.

4. Castro has also demonstrated a considerable capacity for compromise and pragmatic calculation in his attitude toward many of the Latin American governments that he does not consider "revolutionary." He has promoted cultural, sports, and educational exchanges with some of them and seeks to enter into profitable commercial deals without regard to ideology. Havana even discusses economic issues with its philosophical opposites in the hemisphere -- including the Brazilian military regime.

5. Castro has also assumed a flexible stance in Central America. The Honduran government's willingness to buy Cuban sugar last year undoubtedly is more promising in Havana's view than a loosely structured group of about a dozen Honduran revolutionaries, several of whom reportedly received guerrilla instruction in Cuba. Even Guatemala, low on Cuba's list of progressive governments, reportedly is no longer a target of Cuban subversion. A top leader of the Guatemalan Rebel Armed Forces who recently visited Havana, reportedly wrote his colleagues early this year that he believes the Cubans have abandoned the armed, violent approach to revolution in favor of political infiltration and compromise.

6. There are nevertheless, a few governments in the hemisphere that Castro is reluctant or unwilling to deal with. He is contemptuous of the military rulers in Uruguay, Bolivia, and Paraguay, and could decide in the future to lend support to revolutionary groups opposed to them if they seemed to pose a viable alternative. Although the Uruguayan Tupamaros reportedly received Cuban support last year, and undoubtedly remain in contact with Havana, there is no recent evidence of Cuban support. Castro's strongest enmity, however, is reserved for the Chilean military government. In the unlikely event that revolutionary Chileans were able to piece together a viable opposition force, he might provide them with important support.

7. Last September, after the demise of the Allende government, Castro promised anti-junta Chileans "all

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the aid in Cuba's power to provide." As the prospects of the Chilean leftists have declined since then, however, Havana apparently has become resigned to the realities of a situation it has little ability to influence. Intelligence reports about current Cuban attitudes toward the large community of Chilean exiles in Cuba differ, but in mid-August Castro was quoted in one as saying that he "will not provide support for new revolutionary adventures."

8. Thus, it is apparent that Havana's subversive and clandestine activities have been a steadily diminishing part of its overall diplomatic offensive in the hemisphere. Cuban intelligence officers are present in relatively large numbers in the countries where Havana is officially represented, and the Cuban news service, national airline, and fishing fleet are used as covers for agents. Unlike in earlier years, however, the objectives of the Cuban intelligence service are primarily to collect information and to promote Cuban interests with established groups. Cuban intelligence activities are more closely scrutinized by advocates of conventional diplomacy than ever before.

9. Other indications support the view that all forms of Cuban subversion are now at their nadir. Intelligence reports received from several sources in Latin America this year confirm the shift of Cuban policy, and suggest that Havana is making it clear to revolutionaries that they can no longer expect Cuban support. Three international front organizations created by Havana in the 1960's to support and coordinate subversive activities have been dismantled or allowed to atrophy. The Latin American Solidarity Organization, the Asian, African, and Latin American People's Solidarity Organization, and the Continental Latin American Student Organization are seldom mentioned in the official Cuban media. The content of Cuban propaganda meanwhile, has shifted from the clarion calls for armed revolution common in the 1960's to reasoned discussions of many Latin American issues.

10. Castro's willingness to adopt new methods for the new times in Latin America is the result both of his reappraisal of international conditions and pressures, and of personal and domestic considerations. Now 48,

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Fidel is no longer the inflexible revolutionary and incorrigible romantic that he was during his early years in power. Instead, he has increasingly demonstrated a desire to find compromise solutions for Cuba's problems. Today he more frugally manages Cuba's limited resources and, preoccupied with domestic development priorities and the institutionalization of the Revolution, he appears to have little interest in quixotic policies or personalities at home or abroad. In short, Castro is no longer a reckless young gambler.

11. The outlook for the next few years, moreover, is for a continuation of present trends. It is unlikely that for the sake of any minuscule subversive group, Castro will compromise the formal ties he has so worked so persistently to acquire with Latin American countries. He probably can be expected to honor his pledges to refrain from meddling in the internal affairs of these governments, and he will be increasingly mindful of his improving image throughout the region and anxious to capitalize on it. Even when his intrinsic revolutionary sensitivities are strained by governments he is contemptuous of, he will remember the deleterious effects that proof of significant Cuban subversion would have on his entire foreign policy. Ten years after the imposition of the OAS sanctions when Cuba was caught in a massive subversive plot, Castro has no intention of recreating the conditions that he has struggled so arduously against.

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Chief, Central America
Caribbean Branch

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This is the WIO paper, coordinated with
[REDACTED] & at the division level here. The original
has gone to [REDACTED] the
requestor.

Members of this branch join me in dissenting from the emphasis and tone of the paper. It errs principally in what it does not say. Good sources reporting against the main are neglected, others are taken out of context or improperly evaluated (see the Guatemalan & Honduran connections in both papers).

Overall, there is a reluctance in the WIO paper to provide analysis, draw conclusions, or look ahead. Basic judgements that are essential to a story like this can and ought to be made. [REDACTED] /DATE/

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THE STATUS OF CUBAN SUBVERSION IN LATIN AMERICA

1. Cuban support of armed subversion in Latin America is at its lowest ebb since Castro came to power. Soviet pressures, the failures and expense of subversive ventures during the 1960's, and changing conditions in Latin America persuaded Havana to begin reappraising its methods in 1968. With the establishment of relations with Chile in 1970, it became even more evident that violent tactics were being gradually abandoned in favor of more orthodox methods of diplomacy and political penetration. Cuban advisors were no longer assigned to Latin American guerrilla groups, and other forms of support to subversive groups abroad were reduced. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Today a few dissident groups, including communist parties, continue to receive some Cuban financial support, and Havana provides training in clandestine and guerrilla methods as well as technical support to selected Latin American revolutionaries, but at levels significantly lower than in previous years.

2. Havana now gives clear priority to its principal objective of wooing Latin American governments into establishing diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba. Some of the top officers [REDACTED] direct[ly] involved in support of armed insurgency, are now devoted to the diplomatic effort. Fidel Castro himself gave emphasis to the diplomatic approach in his speech of 26 July 1974 when he stated that Cuba was "willing to cooperate constructively with that majority of governments capable of implementing an independent foreign policy". He indicated that he expects a number of governments in the region to reestablish ties with Cuba in the coming months and promised that this would be done "on the basis of absolute reciprocal respect and fraternal cooperation".

3. Havana's diplomatic offensive has had considerable success. Eight Latin American and Caribbean governments have diplomatic ties with Havana, and several others are considering similar action. Also, as part of its more flexible Latin American policy, Havana has now, under Soviet pressure,

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reached an accommodation with most of the Moscow-line communist parties in the area; these parties were previously scorned by Havana as being insufficiently revolutionary because of their lack of commitment to armed revolution.

4. It is improbable that the Castro regime will revert to the massive subversive efforts of the 1960's, as long as diplomatic efforts are going well, but Havana will probably continue to provide support to some guerrilla groups on a highly selective, clandestine basis. Cuba's paramilitary involvement in several Near Eastern and African countries is evidence of its continued capability for such activity. Indeed, Castro has not categorically rejected violent revolution as a valid foreign policy instrument, and he is not likely to give up his objective -- announced in September 1973 -- of supporting the armed overthrow of the military regime in Chile. He has been able to do little toward obtaining this goal, however, because the left in Chile is in disarray and the Chilean security forces have been effective.

5. There is little evidence of much Cuban involvement in the export of armed revolution anywhere in Latin America today. Havana is believed to maintain contact with the extremist People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) in Argentina and with the Uruguayan Tupamaros. A small group of Hondurans received guerrilla instruction in Cuba in 1973 and 1974, and at least one top leader of the Guatemalan Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) recently visited Havana. The Castro regime has established a center to support the one thousand Chilean exiles now in Cuba, and some of the Chileans are reportedly receiving military training. Havana is also believed to maintain contact with the Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) through Cuban intelligence operatives in Peru and Argentina, although there is no hard evidence of such contact. Havana might be tempted to provide clandestine support for future efforts to overthrow Latin American regimes distasteful to Cuba, but the risk of endangering Cuba's diplomatic objectives will weigh heavily in considering such support. For instance, despite the increasingly rightist turn of the Argentine government under Mrs. Peron, Havana is not likely to identify itself with the ERP as long as the Peron regime maintains friendly ties with Cuba.

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Remarks: Attached is [REDACTED] draft which we discussed on the phone. As I told you, he would like it forwarded to the requester as a dissenting view, or perhaps as "additional discussion". I support his request in principle, because we are urged not to suppress dissenting views, but you will have to judge how useful it will be in this case.

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RICHARD LEHMAN
D/OCI

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For File: Doc 1 Chrono

Original of [REDACTED] memo and buckslip to [REDACTED]
Copies of both memos and buckslip to Mr. Proctor for info.
Copy of buckslip to [REDACTED] for file.

28 August 1974

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Remarks:

Attached is one of the memoranda that you requested last week when we were discussing the potential problems of a change in the Administration. The other, on Likely Soviet Actions, will be forthcoming shortly. I recommend against any external dissemination of the Libyan-Egyptian paper. It has served its purpose by helping us to think out the problem.

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